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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000393

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RU](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY-RUSSIA RELATIONS REMAIN ON TRACK DESPITE  
KEY DIFFERENCES

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4, b, d

11. (C) SUMMARY. The atmosphere was surprisingly positive during Turkish FM Babacan's February 19-20 visit to Moscow, MFA Russia and Eastern Europe Department Head Meltem Buyukkarakas told us February 26. Trade and investment continue to drive relations, though the Turks are dissatisfied with a trade imbalance weighted heavily against them. Babacan emphasized that Turkey views existing pipeline projects as complementary. The Russians claimed to support any economically feasible pipeline projects, and wished to expand Russian energy investments in Turkey.

12. (C) SUMMARY CONT'D. Russian FM Lavrov appreciated the difficulty of Turkey's struggle against the PKK in northern Iraq, but did not commit Russia to recognizing the PKK as a terrorist organization. Both sides affirmed their support for BSEC as the principal regional organization. Babacan emphasized the cultural and historic bonds with Kosovo that led Turkey to recognize independence. These bonds, coupled with Russia's similar ties to Serbia, could provide a foundation for stability in the region. Babacan was told there has been no change in Russia's position on Cyprus, but that Russia supports a solution acceptable to both sides. The two sides affirmed their support for Iraq's stability and territorial integrity and for engagement with Iran, but Russia's deep distrust of Saakashvili and strong opposition to Georgia's NATO aspirations are not shared by Turkey. Lavrov told Babacan that Russia supports normalizing Turkey-Armenia relations and will try to persuade the GOAM to be more constructive toward Turkey's historical commissions proposal. The two sides did not bridge their differences on Russia's rejection of the linkage between NATO Allies' ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty and the fulfillment of Russia's Istanbul commitments. END SUMMARY.

13. (C) The Turks had some apprehension about pressing forward with FM Babacan's February 19-20 visit to Moscow, coming only days before Russian elections and right after Turkey's swift recognition of Kosovo's independence, Buyukkarakas told us. This was the first Turkish FM-visit to Moscow in four years. Buyukkarakas reported that Babacan found Lavrov surprisingly cooperative and constructive during a nearly 3.5 hour discussion on a wide range of topics, including trade, energy, PKK, Iraq, Iran, Kosovo, the Caucasus, and CFE. Babacan also met with Industry and Energy Minister Hristenko, who co-chairs the Russia-Turkey intergovernmental joint economic commission with Turkish Energy Minister Guler. President Putin and Dmitry Medvedev were unable to meet with Babacan due to the campaign. Buyukkarakas said the two sides reaffirmed the continued importance of a high-level political dialogue and pledged to realize more such visits. MFA U/S Apakan has already invited

his Russian counterpart to Turkey for political consults in May.

#### TRADE STILL DRIVING THE AGENDA

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14. (C) Trade and investment remain the driving force in Turkey-Russia relations. Russia is Turkey's number two trading partner, with Turkey reporting that bilateral trade reached \$28 billion in 2007. Bilateral trade is heavily weighted in Russia's favor due to energy exports. Babacan reportedly sought commitments from Lavrov and Hristenko to help balance trade by expanding opportunities for Turkish construction firms. Lavrov praised the quality of Turkish construction companies and encouraged them to bid on Sochi Winter Games projects. At the same time, the Russians sought expanded opportunities for Russian companies in Turkish energy, tourism and infrastructure projects.

15. (C) Babacan told his counterparts that Turkey views existing pipeline projects as complementary. Lavrov said he agreed, noted Turkey's strategic importance, and cited the existing BOTAS/GAZPROM MOU. Buyukkarakas said the Russian side sought expanded opportunities to invest in natural gas facilities, electricity distribution, and nuclear power projects in Turkey. The Russians told Babacan that, in support of regional energy security, Russia does not oppose any economically feasible pipeline project.

#### PKK/COUNTER-TERRORISM

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16. (C) Babacan briefed Lavrov on the anti-PKK operation in northern Iraq and asked Russia to list the PKK as a terrorist organization, Buyukkarakas said. Lavrov reportedly

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appreciated the difficulty of Turkey's struggle against the PKK, but the PKK not having attacked inside Russia has precluded the government from seeking a court decision to that effect. (Turkish law similarly restricts the GOT from formally recognizing a terrorist group that has not struck inside Turkey or against Turkish interests abroad.) The two sides pledged to continue discussing the issue through their existing bilateral security mechanism. Asked if Russian allegations about Turkish support for Chechen or Dagestani separatists remained a bilateral issue, Buyukkarakas described it as a "technical issue," not raised during high-level visits.

#### REGIONAL DIFFERENCES REMAIN, BUT CONFLUENCE ON SOME KEY ISSUES

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17. (C) The two sides reaffirmed their support for BSEC as the principal international organization in the Black Sea region, according to Buyukkarakas. Both sides believe existing BSEC mechanisms should be utilized without duplication by other organizations. Lavrov reportedly endorsed BSEC-EU cooperation, but wants cooperation directly between organizations, not EU cooperation with a "wider Black Sea area."

18. (C) There was no getting around differences on Kosovo, whose independence Turkey was among the first to recognize. Babacan reportedly told Lavrov Turkey's strong historical and cultural bonds with Kosovo demanded Turkey's special attention to Kosovo and recognition of its independence. Buyukkarakas said Babacan posited that Turkey's special ties to Kosovo, coupled with Russia's similar relations with Serbia, could form a foundation for peace and stability in the region. Buyukkarakas said Cyprus was not discussed in detail and Turkey does not expect change any overnight change in Russia's staunchly pro-Greek Cypriot position. Babacan urged Lavrov to support renewed negotiations, while Lavrov said Russia endorsed the Gambari plan and would support a

solution acceptable to both sides. Lavrov reportedly told Babacan that President Putin's mention of Turkish Cypriot independence was not an endorsement of "TRNC" independence, but rather Putin trying to characterize a "double standard" being applied by the West in Kosovo.

¶9. (C) The two sides reaffirmed their shared approach in support of Iraq's stability and territorial integrity, and agreed the Iranian nuclear problem should be settled through dialogue. Lavrov reportedly told Babacan that Russia, like Turkey, opposes Iran's isolation and supports confidence building measures.

¶10. (C) Lavrov was critical of Georgia, noted Buyukkarakas. She said Lavrov does not trust Georgian President Saakashvili, whom he described as "NATO obsessed," and told Babacan that Russia needs positive signals from Georgia to normalize relations. He reportedly complained about what he described as Georgia's dangerous, offensive military build-up. Buyukkarakas said Lavrov expressed support for normalized Turkey-Armenia relations and said he would try to persuade Yerevan to be more constructive on Turkey's historical commissions offer. Buyukkarakas stressed that Turkey did not ask for mediation, only Russian persuasion.

CFE: SECURITY PRIORITIES DIVERGE;  
A WINK AND NOD ON TURKEY'S UNSC SEAT?  
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¶11. (C) Lavrov rejected the linkage between the Istanbul commitments and NATO Allies' ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty, according to Buyukkarakas. Lavrov said he expected Turkish sensitivity to Russia's security concerns, while Babacan stressed that CFE is a key security concern for Turkey. Despite these differences, she said Lavrov was conciliatory, and both sides would continue the dialogue at an experts-level. Buyukkarakas mentioned that Babacan raised Turkey's desire for a UNSC seat. Lavrov predictably declined to state how Russia would vote, but the Turks believe they received a positive signal "between the lines."

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